

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT

General Description

The EXISTING DEVELOPMENT map shows the type of land use for every property in Westfield. A separate map, entitled EXISTING DEVELOPMENT – DETAIL OF COMMERCIAL AREAS (following the EXISTING DEVELOPMENT map), shows at an enlarged scale the existing land use in the central portion of the Town. This map is based upon review of the Town's tax records and upon field surveys. In many cases where multiple uses exist on one lot, the use shown on the map has been simplified to represent the predominant use type. Also, due to the limitations of data collection, the existence of a certain use on the map should not be construed to support the legality of any uses or structures that may not conform to zoning regulations.

In examining these maps, three facts stand out: 1) the Town is almost fully developed, 2) the dominant land use is residential, primarily single-family detached structures, and 3) there is a central area of commercial development along the railroad and in adjacent areas. In addition, a few smaller areas of non-residential development exist outside of the central commercial area. Within this broad pattern, there is much diversity in the type and character of development in the community.

Perhaps the most significant factor in determining the existing development pattern of Westfield is the railroad that crosses the Town in an east-west direction. As is typical in many suburbs, the coming of the railroad was quickly followed by commercial, industrial and residential development located in close proximity to the rail line. Although the railroad has declined as a factor in determining land use patterns, most of Westfield's commercial development is still located within a few blocks of the railroad and North and South Avenues, which run alongside the rail line. The primary retail shopping area in Town is located in a triangular area north of the North Avenue railroad station.

Many of the residential structures that were built in close proximity to the railroad have been converted to commercial or professional office use or have been altered to contain more than one dwelling unit. These structures are generally located in a broad band about 2,000 feet north or south of the railroad. Outside of the central business district, commercial and office development has occurred along Springfield Avenue, reflecting the proximity of that road to Route 22 and the importance of Springfield Avenue as an arterial road.

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Industrial development in Westfield is quite limited, existing at the eastern end of North Avenue and South Avenue adjacent to Garwood, and in the southwest corner of the Town adjacent to Clark, where a power station exists.

Public and semi-public land uses are scattered throughout the community, although a higher concentration occurs in the central business area. Public and semi-public uses include the buildings and open space system maintained by the Town of Westfield, Union County offices and parks, schools, churches, cemeteries, Echo Lake Country Club and other facilities.

Most of the remainder of Westfield is developed for various types of residential use. Single-family detached housing is the predominant housing type; it occurs throughout the Town in a wide range of densities. As noted above, a broad area paralleling the railroad contains many two-family and multi-family dwellings. Many of these structures have been converted, some illegally, from single-family usage. Townhouses and multi-family complexes exist in scattered locations, including some age-restricted developments. Most of these developments have occurred on large parcels of land that remained after much of the Town's single-family housing was constructed.

Future Projections

Most of Westfield's future development will be of three types: 1) "infill" development of vacant lots, 2) subdivision of large lots into smaller parcels, and 3) conversion/renovation of existing structures. In many areas, the neighborhood land use pattern is stable and unlikely to change significantly in the future. In a few areas, however, there will be development pressures that could change the existing neighborhood patterns. In some cases, this is desirable, and should be encouraged. In others, regulations to preserve existing land use patterns should be adopted and/or enforced.

Infill Development

The vacant land in Westfield is shown on the EXISTING DEVELOPMENT map. Most of the lots are small isolated parcels, and most are located in residential neighborhoods. In the future, it is anticipated that some of these lots will be developed for single-family detached housing. The map also shows a number of larger vacant tracts. Most of these tracts are unsuitable for large-scale development due to environmental factors.

Subdivision of Large Lots

In addition to the vacant lots that exist in Westfield, there are a fair number of large developed lots that could possibly be subdivided and developed for housing

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development. The zoning and subdivision regulations should be designed to ensure that future subdivisions and home construction will maintain the existing character of the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Conversions

Conversions and renovations have occurred in Westfield for years and there will probably continue to be conversions of three basic types: 1) conversion from single family residential use to two or more dwelling units within one structure, 2) conversion or renovation from residential to partial or full nonresidential use, and 3) conversion from one nonresidential use to another nonresidential use. The conversions to increase the number of dwelling units in a structure are typically the result of various demographic and economic factors, including smaller household size, aging of the population, and the rising cost of living, including the cost of housing. Also, when the tenure of housing shifts from owner- to renter-occupancy, these types of conversions are more frequent. This trend has been most noticeable in those neighborhoods within a 2,000 ft. wide band directly south of and parallel to South Avenue. Common problems that occur with such conversions include insufficient off-street parking, increased pavement for driveways, reduced privacy, increased noise, fire hazards and other concerns related to improper renovations. Also, property values may be affected. Strict enforcement of the zoning and building codes in the future is necessary to prevent these problems.

Conversions from residential to non-residential use have occurred in areas near the central business district, along North and South Avenues, along Central Avenue and in the professional use zones on Broad Street, St. Paul Street, Euclid Avenue and Westfield Avenue. Continued conversion can be expected in these areas, depending on market and economic factors, site suitability, etc. While the Town's land use plan and zoning ordinance allow such conversions, development regulations in these areas should carefully regulate conversions so that commercial development is of a high quality, is compatible with the professional uses that already exist, and is sensitive to the needs of the residents that continue to live in the neighborhood.

Conversions from one nonresidential use are a normal and expected occurrence in most municipalities. This occurs in all of the commercial areas in Westfield. Such conversions are expected and often beneficial, particularly when they are accompanied by an upgrade to buildings and other site improvements. Also, the new use can, in some cases, help to revitalize a stagnant commercial area. Conversions may also be detrimental or an indicator of existing negative conditions, however. A continuing pattern of frequent conversions can signal a struggling commercial site or neighborhood. Also, conversion from a compatible use to a use that is incompatible with commercial development on the same site or in the neighborhood can be disruptive. Third, conversions often accompany expansions;

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an intensification of use may have negative impacts, unless space exists to provide adequate setbacks, parking and landscaping, and unless the street system is able to accommodate such expansion.

Where frequent conversions are an indicator of long-term problems in commercial areas or on individual sites, municipal efforts may be beneficial, or even necessary, in addressing the problems. The Town, through participation in the Main Street program and creation of a downtown management corporation, has recognized that governmental assistance and cooperation can reap positive results in the central business district.

The zoning regulations, historic preservation regulations, design guidelines and other land use policy documents should be designed to permit appropriate conversions of non-residential properties. Nonconforming conditions should be brought into compliance as quickly as possible. Upgrades, where needed, to existing buildings and improvements should be encouraged. Inappropriate conversions or expansions should be prohibited, however, through restrictions of use, lot area and dimensions, setbacks, floor area ratio, building height and coverage, and through detailed design standards addressing such issues as parking, access and circulation, drainage, lighting, landscaping and signs.